

Amendments to the Claims: Please replace all prior versions and listings of claims with the following listing of claims.

LISTING OF CLAIMS:

1-179. (Cancelled)

180. (Currently Amended) A method for detecting postage fraud using a unique mail piece indicium, comprising:

maintaining a transaction database that stores tracking identifiers associated with mail pieces that a postage validation computer system previously validated or rejected, wherein the tracking identifiers associated with the previously validated or rejected mail pieces provide a delivery status tracking capability within the United States Postal Service;

reading, [[at]] with the United States Postal Service postage validation computer system, a postage indicium carried located on a current mail piece handled by the United States Postal Service, wherein the postage indicium contains a certificate serial number and a tracking identifier[[,]] associated with the tracking identifier providing a current mail piece tracking capability within the United States Postal Service;

comparing, at transmitting a request to validate the postage validation computer system, the tracking identifier associated with indicium located on the current mail piece from the United States Postal Service to a vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system, wherein the request to validate the postage indicium includes the tracking identifier contained identifiers stored in the postage indicium located on the mail piece transaction database; and

validating or rejecting receiving, at the postage indicium carried on United States Postal Service, data from the current mail piece based on the postage validation vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system comparing indicating whether the tracking identifier associated with contained in the current mail piece to postage indicium matches any the tracking identifiers stored records in [[a]] the transaction database that stores tracking identifiers contained in postage indicia located on mail pieces previously handled by the United States Postal Service, wherein the United States Postal Service submits the current mail piece

for normal delivery if the postage validation data received from the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system validates ~~indicates that the tracking identifier contained in the postage indicium~~ carried ~~located on the current mail piece~~ ~~does not match any of the records in the transaction database.~~

181. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 180, wherein the tracking identifiers stored in the transaction database and the tracking identifier associated with the current mail piece comprise ~~comprises a delivery confirmation code~~ codes that provide ~~provides the delivery status~~ mail piece tracking capability within the United States Postal Service.

182. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 180, ~~wherein the data received from the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system further represents~~ comprising:

displaying contents read from the postage indicium carried on the current mail piece,
wherein the contents read from the postage indicium include one or more of an amount, a creation date and time, a service class, an optional data advance, or a delivery zip code associated with the postage indicium~~[[,]]~~₂ and

comparing the contents read from the postage indicium to human-readable shipping information further carried on the current mail piece, wherein the United States Postal Service ~~does not submit~~ submits the current mail piece for the normal delivery if the contents read data received from the postage indicium ~~vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system~~ ~~does not match~~ the human-readable shipping information further located carried on the mail piece.

183. (Currently Amended) The method of claim ~~[[180]]~~ 182, further comprising comparing the tracking identifier contained in the postage indicium carried on the current mail piece to a printed tracking identifier further carried on the mail piece, wherein the United States Postal Service ~~does not submit~~ submits the current mail piece for the normal delivery if the tracking identifier contained in the postage indicium ~~does not match a standard~~ matches the printed tracking identifier further located carried on the current mail piece.

184. (Currently Amended) The method of claim ~~[[180]]~~ 189, wherein the United States Postal Service does not submit the current mail piece for the normal delivery if the postage validation data received from the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system determines ~~indicates~~ that the tracking identifier associated with ~~contained in the postage indicium located on the~~ current mail piece matches one or more of the tracking identifiers stored records in the transaction database, the contents read from the postage indicium do not match the human-readable shipping information further carried on the mail piece, the tracking identifier contained in the postage indicium does not match the printed tracking identifier further carried on the current mail piece, or the public key corresponding to the certificate serial number and the digital signature associated with the postage indicium are inconsistent.

185. (Cancelled)

186. (Currently Amended) The method of claim ~~[[185]]~~ 180, wherein the United States Postal Service directly or indirectly issues ~~receives~~ the tracking identifier request from identifiers stored in the transaction database ~~vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system~~ and sends the generated tracking identifier associated with ~~to the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system in response to the tracking identifier request~~ current mail piece.

187. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 180, wherein the ~~United States Postal Service scans a two-dimensional bar code further located on the~~ current mail piece carries to read the postage indicium in a two-dimensional barcode.

188. (Currently Amended) The method of claim ~~[[187]]~~ 183, further comprising obtaining, at wherein the United States Postal Service obtains postage validation computer system, a public key corresponding to the certificate serial meter number contained in or an account number associated with the postage indicium in response to scanning the two-dimensional bar code.

189. (Currently Amended) The method of claim ~~[[187]]~~ 188, further comprising verifying consistency between the public key corresponding to the certificate serial number and a digital signature associated with the postage indicium carried on the current mail piece, wherein the United States Postal Service ~~submits~~ obtains the current mail piece for certificate serial number contained in the normal delivery if postage indicium in response to scanning the public key corresponding to two-dimensional bar code, and wherein the data received from the ~~vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system further verifies consistency between the certificate serial number contained in the postage indicium and [[a]] the digital signature associated with~~ derived from the tracking identifier further contained in the postage indicium are consistent.

190-193. (Cancelled)

194. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 180, wherein the United States Postal Service transmits ~~[[the]]~~ a request to validate the postage indicium to the ~~vendor-controlled postage-issuing~~ postage validation computer system and receives ~~the data validating or rejecting the postage indicium~~ from the ~~vendor-controlled postage-issuing postage validation~~ computer system over a network.

195. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 194, further comprising displaying the data validating or rejecting the postage indicium ~~received from the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system~~ at the United States Postal Service.

196. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 195, further comprising verifying proof of payment for the postage indicium located on the current mail piece from the data displayed at the United States Postal Service, wherein the United States Postal Service submits the current mail piece for the normal delivery if the United States Postal Service verifies the proof of payment for the postage indicium with the displayed data.

197. (Currently Amended) The method of claim ~~[[195]]~~ 194, further comprising:

storing information relating to wherein the current mail piece in data displayed at the transaction database, wherein the stored information relating to United States Postal Service comprises an address for a sender of the current mail piece includes the postage indicium carried thereon, the certificate serial number and the tracking identifier contained in the postage indicium carried thereon, and the data validating or rejecting the postage indicium;
and

indexing the information relating to the current mail piece with the tracking identifier contained in the postage indicium carried thereon.

198. (Currently Amended) A system for detecting postage fraud using a unique mail piece indicium, comprising:

a transaction database configured to store tracking identifiers associated with mail pieces that a postal verifier previously validated or rejected, wherein the tracking identifiers associated with the previously validated or rejected mail pieces provide a delivery status tracking capability within computer system located at the United States Postal Service; and

a postage validation network connection that links the computer system coupled located at the United States Postal Service to a vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system the transaction database, wherein the postage validation computer system located at the United States Postal Service is includes one or more processors configured to:

read a postage indicium carried located on a current mail piece handled by the United States Postal Service, wherein the postage indicium contains a certificate serial number and a tracking identifier[[,]] associated with the tracking identifier providing a current mail piece tracking capability within the United States Postal Service;

compare transmit a request to validate the tracking identifier associated with postage indicium located on the current mail piece to the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system, wherein the request to validate the postage indicium includes the tracking identifier contained identifiers stored in the postage indicium located on the mail piece transaction database; and

validate or reject the postage indicium carried on ~~receive data from the~~ current mail piece based on the comparison of ~~vendor controlled postage issuing computer system indicating whether the tracking identifier associated with contained in the current mail piece to postage indicium matches any the tracking identifiers stored records in [[a]] the transaction database that stores tracking identifiers contained in postage indicia located on mail pieces previously handled by the United States Postal Service, wherein the United States Postal Service submits the current mail piece for normal delivery if the postage validation data received from the vendor controlled postage issuing computer system validates indicates that the tracking identifier contained in the postage indicium carried located on the current mail piece does not match any of the records in the transaction database.~~

199. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 198, wherein the tracking identifiers stored in the transaction database and the tracking identifier associated with the current mail piece ~~comprise comprises a delivery confirmation code codes that provide provides the delivery status~~ mail piece tracking capability within the United States Postal Service.

200. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 198, wherein the one or more processors are data received from the vendor controlled postage issuing computer system further represents configured to display contents read from the postage indicium carried on the current mail piece, wherein the contents read from the postage indicium include one or more of an amount, a creation date and time, a service class, an optional data advance, or a delivery zip code associated with the postage indicium, [[and]] wherein the United States Postal Service does not submit submits the current mail piece for the normal delivery if the contents read data received from the postage indicium vendor controlled postage issuing computer system not matching match human-readable shipping information further located carried on the mail piece.

201. **(Currently Amended)** The system of claim ~~[[198]]~~ 200, wherein the United States Postal Service ~~does not submit~~ submits the current mail piece for the normal delivery if the tracking identifier contained in the postage indicium ~~does not match~~ matches a ~~standard~~ printed tracking identifier further ~~located~~ carried on the current mail piece.

202. **(Currently Amended)** The system of claim ~~[[198]]~~ 207, wherein the United States Postal Service does not submit the current mail piece for the normal delivery if the postage validation data received from the vendor controlled postage issuing computer system determines ~~indicates~~ that the tracking identifier associated with ~~contained in the postage indicium located on~~ the current mail piece matches one or more of the tracking identifiers stored ~~records~~ in the transaction database, the contents read from the postage indicium do not match the human-readable shipping information further carried on the mail piece, the tracking identifier contained in the postage indicium does not match the printed tracking identifier further carried on the current mail piece, or the public key corresponding to the certificate serial number and the digital signature associated with the postage indicium are inconsistent.

203. **(Cancelled)**

204. **(Previously Presented)** The system of claim 203, wherein the ~~computer system located at the~~ United States Postal Service directly or indirectly issues ~~is configured to receive the tracking identifier request from identifiers stored in the transaction database vendor controlled postage issuing computer system and send the generated tracking identifier associated with to the vendor controlled postage issuing computer system over the network connection in response to the tracking identifier request~~ current mail piece.

205. **(Currently Amended)** The system of claim 198, wherein the ~~United States Postal Service scans a two dimensional bar code further located on the~~ current mail piece ~~carries to read the postage indicium in a two dimensional barcode.~~

206. **(Currently Amended)** The system of claim ~~[[205]]~~ 201, wherein the one or more processors are further configured to obtain ~~United States Postal Service obtains~~ a public key corresponding to the certificate serial meter number contained in ~~or an account number associated with the postage indicium in response to scanning the two-dimensional bar code.~~

207. **(Currently Amended)** The system of claim ~~[[205]]~~ 206, wherein the one or more processors are further configured to verify consistency between the public key corresponding to the certificate serial number and a digital signature associated with the postage indicium carried on the current mail piece, wherein the United States Postal Service submits ~~obtains the current mail piece for certificate serial number contained in the normal delivery if postage indicium in response to scanning the public key corresponding to two-dimensional bar code, and wherein the data received from the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system further verifies consistency between the certificate serial number contained in the postage indicium and [[a]] the digital signature associated with~~ derived from the tracking identifier further contained in the postage indicium are consistent.

208-211. **(Cancelled)**

212. **(Currently Amended)** The system of claim 198, further comprising a master tracking ~~wherein the computer system located at the United States Postal Service [[is]] and configured to transmit [[the]] a request to validate the postage indicium to the vendor-controlled postage-issuing postage validation computer system and receive the data validating or rejecting the postage indicium from the vendor-controlled postage-issuing postage validation computer system over [[the]] a network connection.~~

213. **(Currently Amended)** The system of claim 212, wherein the master tracking computer system located at the United States Postal Service is further configured to display the data validating or rejecting received from the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system postage indicium.

214. **(Currently Amended)** The system of claim 213, wherein the United States Postal Service verifies proof of payment for the postage indicium located on the current mail piece from the data displayed at the master tracking computer system ~~located at the United States Postal Service, wherein the United States Postal Service~~ and submits the current mail piece for the normal delivery if the United States Postal Service verifies the proof of payment for the postage indicium with the displayed data.

215. **(Currently Amended)** The system of claim ~~[[213]]~~ 212, wherein the one or more processors are further configured to:

store information relating to the current mail piece in data displayed at the transaction database, wherein the stored information relating to computer system located at the United States Postal Service comprises an address for a sender of the current mail piece includes the postage indicium carried thereon, the certificate serial number and the tracking identifier contained in the postage indicium carried thereon, and the data validating or rejecting the postage indicium; and

index the information relating to the current mail piece with the tracking identifier contained in the postage indicium carried thereon.

216. **(Currently Amended)** The system of claim 198, wherein the United States Postal Service further assumes that the postage indicium carried ~~located~~ on the current mail piece has not been fraudulently duplicated if the postage validation ~~data received from the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system~~ validates ~~indicates~~ that the tracking identifier associated with the current mail piece ~~contained therein~~ does not match any of the tracking identifiers stored ~~records~~ in the transaction database.

217. **(Currently Amended)** The method of claim 180, wherein the United States Postal Service further assumes that the postage indicium carried ~~located~~ on the current mail piece has not been fraudulently duplicated if the postage validation ~~data received from the vendor-controlled postage-issuing~~ computer system validates ~~indicates~~ that the tracking identifier associated with the current mail piece ~~contained therein~~ does not match any of the tracking identifiers stored ~~records~~ in the transaction database.